

SOME PROPOSALS FOR A STATEMENT OF TERTIARY EDUCATION NEEDS, GAPS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE CANTERBURY REGION

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Introduction

The development of a regional statement of needs, gaps and priorities in tertiary education in Canterbury forms an important element in the reform of tertiary education set in motion by government over the past year. The purpose of this paper is to respond to, and offer a critique of, a discussion document produced in May 2007. The paper suggests that a broad understanding of goals and purposes and of tertiary education should underpin the final statement.

The May Discussion Document

This discussion document is shaped almost exclusively by the government's economic transformation agenda and its implications for tertiary education. This is particularly striking in the Executive Summary (pp 3-4), the diagram on pages 5 & 6 summarising the 'Draft Needs, Gaps and Priorities in Tertiary Education Provision for the Canterbury Region', and in the Background and Purpose section (pp 7 & 8). For example, Figure 1 (p 8) comprises a triangle which reflects an exclusive pre-occupation with the relationship between the economic transformation agenda, workplace productivity and the tertiary education strategy. It seems to me that despite major limitations the discourse of government is very much broader than is suggested in the current draft document. Government does recognise the place of ACE within tertiary education and recognises that the role of tertiary education organisations is very much wider than that implied by the economic transformation agenda.

A key document setting out government's expectations for tertiary education is the Tertiary Education Strategy 2007–12 (Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education, 2006). This document was released by the Minister of Tertiary Education in December 2006. The first three sections of this document set out the government's goals for New Zealand, challenges and opportunities faced

by tertiary education, a new approach to planning and funding tertiary education, and the expected contributions of tertiary education to New Zealand. There is much within these sections that draws on progressive and social democratic philosophies/discourses.

However, the final section, which sets out governments' short-term priorities, reflects a far narrower understanding of the sector and its contribution. Within this narrower framework, there is little scope for the contributions of ACE to be recognised and acknowledged. On the other hand, the document does state that: 'These priorities are not an exhaustive list of all that the government values from tertiary education.'

In light of this, I suggest we should draw on the government's own tertiary education strategy document to provide a starting-point in developing our own regional plan for Canterbury.

The Context for the Tertiary Education Strategy – The Tertiary Education Sector

The Tertiary Education Strategy document defines tertiary education very broadly. ACE is explicitly included. The document states:

'The New Zealand tertiary education system makes a unique and invaluable contribution to the country's national development in all dimensions – social, economic, cultural and environmental. The sector has a number of strengths, including a strong tradition of providing access to a broad range of education opportunities and an increasing focus on excellence in research.'

'Tertiary education in New Zealand includes all post-school education. It includes:

- adult and community education (ACE)
- foundation education, comprising literacy, numeracy and language as well as basic computing, and interpersonal skills
- certificates and diplomas
- bachelors degrees
- postgraduate qualifications, many of them requiring students to conduct substantial original research
- industry training, including modern apprenticeships.' (Tertiary Education Strategy, 2006 p 6)

The Government's Goals for New Zealand

The document states that the government's aim

'.. is a high income, knowledge-based economy, which is both innovative and creative, and provides a unique quality of life to all New Zealanders.'

‘Tertiary education will help achieve that goal by providing high quality learning and research, contributing to the sustainable economic and social development of the nation and providing for a diversity of teaching and research that fosters the achievement of international standards of learning and, as relevant, scholarship.’

Three themes are identified:

- Economic Transformation: accelerating the pace of change in our economy,
- Families Young and Old: providing families with the support to maximise potential, and
- National Identity – pride in who and what we are

Under each of the themes, opportunities are sketched showing how tertiary education can contribute to social and economic outcomes.

It is important to note that although ‘economic transformation’ takes pride of place in government thinking, it seems that the government’s intention is that this should be balanced by other goals. These include for example:

- ‘environmental sustainability’ and the need to provide people ‘with the knowledge and skills to understand and work within environmental constraints.’
- contributing to ‘greater personal wellbeing and security for individuals, families and whanau, and improved outcomes for children.’
- providing ‘quality teaching and research to support and develop New Zealand’s health, education, justice and social services systems.’
- promoting and supporting ‘our arts, culture, film, sports and music; our natural environment; our history and our stance on international issues.’
- safeguarding and interpreting ‘our shared and diverse cultures and view of our place in the world.’
- supporting ‘Maori success by maintaining and developing Maori language and culture.’

A new approach to planning, funding, quality assurance & monitoring for tertiary education organisations

A new approach to planning, funding, quality assurance and monitoring in tertiary education is outlined in the document. It states that by 2008 new legislation will be in place to support the implementation of this system. It is claimed that the new system will promote ‘a much stronger focus on quality and relevance.’

Further, it is intended to ensure that tertiary education organisations identify, plan for, and meet the needs of students, employers, industry, Maori, community groups and other stakeholders. 'It will do this through.. requiring tertiary education organisations to demonstrate that their education and research is contributing to economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes for New Zealand and New Zealanders.'

The document states that:

'The government recognises that its investment system needs to change to support tertiary education organisations to shift their focus from participation and funding to achievement and the long term needs of stakeholders.'

It argues:

'One of the outcomes of these changes will be greater clarity about the government's expectations of tertiary education organisations. This does not mean that government is trying to define all the needs and priorities for the system. The priorities are designed to reflect both national and local needs. While contributing to the national priorities, tertiary education organisations need to serve their local communities.'

Furthermore, it states:

'The new system will be focussed on a differentiated but complementary network of provision. This requires stronger collaboration between tertiary education organisations ... It also requires better connections with organisations and sectors outside the tertiary system, to ensure the relevance of tertiary education and research for industry, business and community groups.' (p 13)

One of the key elements of the new system is the explicit recognition of the distinctive contributions made by different types of tertiary organisations. The document outlines the government's expectations of the different types of tertiary education organisations. These include universities, Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics, Wananga, Industry Training Organisations, Private Training Establishments, Adult and Community Education Providers and Other Tertiary Education Providers.

'The distinctive contributions.. set a clear expectation of the role that each type of tertiary education organisation will play in achieving an excellent, relevant tertiary education system. Together these distinctive contributions need to add up to a tertiary education system that contributes through:

- success for all New Zealanders through lifelong learning
- creating and applying knowledge to drive innovation

- strong connections between tertiary education organisations and the communities they serve.

These three areas of expected contribution provide an enduring direction for the tertiary education sector.'

As far as ACE is concerned, the document draws on previous policy work and states the following:

Adult and community education providers are diverse in nature, ranging from universities to Rural Education Activities Programmes (REAPS), and while their approaches are naturally quite different, their provision of adult and community education is expected to align to five national priorities:

1. targeting learners whose initial learning was not successful
2. raising foundation skills
3. encouraging lifelong learning
4. strengthening communities by meeting identified community needs
5. strengthening social cohesion.

These priorities represent the distinctive contribution of the adult and community education sector. For some providers, this is their only contribution to tertiary education, and hence this represents their full distinctive contribution. For others (in particular, tertiary education institutions), this represents a small part of their role, and should be delivered in support of their full distinctive contribution.

The achievement of these priorities (and hence the distinctive contribution of the adult and community education sector) is through the continued implementation of the reforms under way in quality assurance, capability building, and funding.' (p 17)

Central to the role of all tertiary education organisations is a focus on educational success. ...

'Tertiary education organisations need to be able to respond to the diverse needs and aspirations of students of all ethnicities, ages, and socio-economic backgrounds.' (p 18)

Moreover the government expects all tertiary education organisations to work effectively with stakeholders to ensure that the education and research they provide contributes the skills and knowledge needed for sustainable economic, social, and cultural development. (p 18)

For these reasons the document also discusses the importance of strong connections being established between tertiary organisations themselves, as well as with the communities they serve.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to suggest that the Regional Statement of Tertiary Education Needs, Gaps and Priorities for Canterbury needs to be a much more broadly based statement than that contained in the May discussion document. Attention has been focused on the Tertiary Education Strategy document to highlight the importance of drawing more fully on the government's own policy documents as well as on a process of wider and ongoing regional consultation. Identifying needs is a complex and dynamic process (Stalker, Peet, Tobias, & Delahunty, 2006).

References

- Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education. (2006). *Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-2012 incorporating Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities 2008-10*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Stalker, J., Peet, K., Tobias, R., & Delahunty, C. (2006). Who needs it? Three essential elements of a framework for assessing needs (pp. 4): ACE Aotearoa.